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Congress of the United States
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May 5, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader McConnell:

As we prepare a future package to the fight against coronavirus, I ask you to build off our work to protect vulnerable populations in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), particularly those experiencing domestic violence at home, and include vital funding for services for these victims.

Unlike many of our households during this pandemic, victims of intimate partner violence are not safe from their daily nightmare of abuse when sheltering at home. With “stay at home” orders imposed across the United States, these individuals and oftentimes, their children, are trapped with their abusers. As we witnessed during Hurricane Harvey in my home state of Texas, during times of higher stress and uncertainty, especially while trapped at home, we have seen surges in domestic violence. Across the United States, law enforcement in many major cities are observing increased call volumes reporting domestic violence. In Houston, officers received roughly 300 more calls pertaining to domestic violence in March 2020 in comparison to the month prior.¹ In Austin, there were 252 family violence arrests in March 2020 as compared with 215 arrests in March 2019.² As such, I ask you to consider including vital provisions and flexibility to protect and provide life-saving resources to those experiencing these abuses.

First, I encourage Congress to provide much-needed emergency housing resources for victims of domestic violence. Specifically, Congress should provide additional funding for both the Health and Human Services Department’s (HHS) Family Violence and Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) formula grants to states and the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus. While I am grateful for the \$45 million for the

¹ Police see rise in domestic violence calls amid coronavirus lockdown, NBC News (April 5, 2020) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/police-see-rise-domestic-violence-calls-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-n1176151>

² Coronavirus in Austin: Overall arrests plummet, but domestic violence rises, the Austin-American Statesman (April 30, 2020) <https://www.statesman.com/news/20200430/coronavirus-in-austin-overall-arrests-plummet-but-domestic-violence-rises>

FVPSA formula grants to states included in the CARES Act as well as the suspension of matching requirement, I believe the demonstrated need for emergency housing that can be funded through both programs is far greater. During a time when we are seeing increases in cases of domestic violence, funding for both programs will continue to provide much-needed shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic violence and their children. Moreover, I urge Congress to include language to any future package to expedite the release of funds for the Continuum of Care program, which have yet to be released for fiscal year 2020, and will serve as a force multiplier if paired with additional appropriation from Congress.

Furthermore, as we identify emergency housing solutions for vulnerable populations, I believe the immediate need for housing could be met by our hospitality industry that is experiencing increased vacancies at hotels and motels across the U.S. The hospitality industry has led nationwide initiatives for to house medical workers during this time and it is my hope that this effort be expanded to provide housing for domestic violence victims and vulnerable populations. As such, Congress should maintain and maximize flexibility in emergency housing programs to ensure hotels and motels can be provided to victims.


Lastly, we must ensure that employees and volunteers who serve at domestic violence organizations receive the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) they urgently need to serve their communities. These individuals operate on the front lines of domestic violence cases and desperately want to help victims without the fear of contracting the coronavirus themselves. Please consider including funding for PPE for individuals who work and volunteer at domestic violence organizations who are in direct contact with the people they assist.

As we look to the future, I also look forward to working with both of you to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) as well as provide additional resources for domestic violence victims who depend on VAWA services.

During this pandemic, we have seen the American spirit at its best. Our communities have come together to make sure those most in need receive the resources they need to survive. As Americans, we always rise to the occasion and help the most vulnerable around us. I ask both of you once again to rise to this occasion and provide vital provisions to ensure we support those experiencing domestic violence in their homes.

Thank you for considering these requests to help domestic violence victims during the coronavirus outbreak.

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress